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ABSTRACT

The document presents recommendations voted by the Quality Education Conference III participants as the most pressing items of unfinished business in New Mexico education. Recommendations for public schools are listed under the following subheadings: curricular concerns, communication, staff improvement, and fiscal support. Recommendations for higher education concern curriculum, fiscal support, and governance. The final section briefly describes what the concerned citizen, the policymaker, and the educator can do to insure quality education at local and state levels. (LH)

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UNFINISHED BUSINESS

IN NEW MEXICO EDUCATION

RECOMMENDATIONS OF QUALITY EDUCATION CONFERENCE III

October 1983

SP 022 546

UNFINISHED BUSINESS in New Mexico Education

Education always has unfinished business—things that can be done better, things that ought to be done differently, things that should not be done at all.

Quality Education Conference III participants voted the following recommendations the most pressing items of unfinished business in New Mexico education.

Recommendations for Public Schools

Curricular Concerns

- Writing skills should be emphasized across the curriculum, in all subjects, at elementary and secondary levels.
- Study skills should be emphasized in every subject at every grade level.
- More emphasis should be placed on improvement of K-5 levels of education where attitudes toward learning are acquired and learning habits are formed.
- Schools should take a critical look at what is being done in the area of vocational/technical education.
- The State Department of Education should be asked to review and evaluate its policies and procedures relative to
  (a) prekindergarten programs
  (b) full-time kindergarten
  (c) accreditation of private schools
  (d) pupil-teacher ratio
  (e) length of state and local school board terms
  (f) vocational education funding
  (g) special education guidelines

Communication

- Communication should be improved between parents and school personnel.
- Meaningful communication should be increased among universities and between universities and public schools.
- Those in policy-making positions should work together to make quality education a reality.
- High school students should be given complete information about curricular offerings, financial assistance, and academic requirements of colleges and universities. A statewide informational program on the skills and knowledge required for success beyond high school should be developed.

The Quality Education Conferences

The first Quality Education Conference met in June 1981. The participants were recommended by the conference's constituent organizations. Among the participants were classroom teachers, business and industry representatives, college faculty members, students, legislators, school board members, PTA representatives, regents, and armed forces personnel.

The first conference was a brainstorming session. Barriers to quality education were identified and a set of priorities established. A follow-up questionnaire was sent to a representative sample of New Mexicans and the results were widely distributed to professionals and the general public.

Many of the same participants met for Quality Education Conference II in June, 1982. These participants studied earlier recommendations and rephrased them as action to be taken. Each recommendation was classified according to the appropriate government unit for the recommended action. This time, the follow-up questionnaire was sent only to conference participants. The purpose

- Career exploration programs should be developed within school districts in cooperation with business/industry to educate students about the world in which they live.

Staff Improvement

- Emphasis should be placed on in-service programs, which are essential for developing new curricula and teaching techniques, keeping teachers current, and improving teaching strategies.
- The practical training of principals should be enhanced to ensure them better preparation for their roles, responsibilities, and duties.
- A comprehensive assessment of public school administration, including identification of actual duties and functions, should be undertaken.
- The role of principals should be changed to that of instructional leader.

Fiscal Support

- A significant effort should be made to improve working conditions and their effect on teacher morale.
- The optimum cost-effective class size for various grade levels, disciplines, and teaching styles should be determined.

was to establish which recommendations the participants felt were most urgent. Another report was prepared and distributed to various constituencies.

Quality Education Conference III met in June 1983 with approximately the same set of participants as the preceding conferences. This meeting took place at a time of fiscal constraint within the state. Tight money and its influence on education was a conference focus. The participants also studied the relevance in New Mexico of various state and national sets of recommendations about education which were being circulated. Another follow-up survey was sent to participants to determine which conference recommendations they most strongly endorsed. These recommendations—New Mexico education's unfinished business—are listed in this folder.

The three conferences on quality education were hosted by New Mexico State University in collaboration with the State Department of Education and the Board of Educational Finance. These agencies also cooperated in the preparation and dissemination of reports of the meetings.

- District or regional service/resource centers should be created to serve rural areas.
- Funding for education should be the state's highest financial priority.

Recommendations for Higher Education

Curricular Concerns

- Higher quality students should be attracted to teacher training programs.
- Student teaching should be lengthened to correspond with the public school semester.
- New Mexico should improve and expand adult/continuing education policies and practices.
- The needs of accelerated and/or highly motivated students should be jointly addressed by secondary and post-secondary institutions.

Fiscal Support

- The climate in which professional staff work in higher education should be improved, even in a time of static resources.
- The BEF should study alternative funding methods for higher education.
- Recruiting efforts of post-secondary institutions should be strengthened and reoriented.

Governance

- The constitutional responsibility of boards of regents to review the distinct missions of institutions and to maintain quality education should be reaffirmed.
- The Academic Council on Higher Education (made up of post-secondary administrators) should be charged with the responsibility of examining the coordination of post-secondary institutions.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

If you are a concerned citizen . . .

Demand the best in education for American young people. Be thoroughly acquainted with your son or daughter's or your relative's educational situation. Visit in local schools and on university campuses more often than merely on parents' or citizens' days. Become active in parent/school organizations and see that those units become active in significant projects to improve education. Know your school board members, local legislators, BEF and State Board of Education members and university regents. Let them know your expectations about public and higher education.

If you are a policy-maker . . .

Know that citizens and professionals expect you to provide resources that promote the best schools and colleges possible. Mere institutional tinkering or piecemeal moves will not suffice. If American education is to be significantly better, it will have to be significantly different. Engage in the passage of forward-looking, comprehensive laws and regulations geared to quality in education at every level.

If you are an educator . . .

Foster the current demand for excellence. Help recommendations for change such as those in this publication become a reality. Let the public know you are demanding more of students. Work to get laymen involved in the schools closest to their lives. Hold regular conferences with parents. Organize forums so that citizens and educators in your area can interact on topics such as the meaning of quality education at the local and state levels.

Above all, every adult needs to be a model of what he or she expects young people to become. Be committed to lifelong learning.

A more detailed report of the recommendations of Quality Education Conference III is available upon request from the College of Education, Box 3AC, New Mexico State University, Las Cruces, N.M. 88003

Prepared by the College of Education, New Mexico State University in cooperation with the New Mexico State Department of Education and the Board of Educational Finance.